

6. FROG-EATING HABIT OF LONGEARED HEDGEHOG *HEMIECHINUS AURITUS* AND GREY MUSK SHREW *SUNCUS MURINUS*

On 4 October 1990, at dawn (around 0600 hrs), a male longeared hedgehog (weight 275 g) was captured by a night-watchman in the World Forestry Arboretum, Jaipur. The animal was kept in a 0.40 m deep empty cemented nursery bed of 10 x 1 m size.

At night, at about 1930 hrs, when I went to observe the animal, it was eating a medium sized toad (*Bufo stomaticus*). The head of the toad was in the mouth of hedgehog and the dying toad was making some jerking motions with its hind legs. The hedgehog did not use its fore-legs to manage its prey. It chewed its prey steadily and finished it within three minutes. No residue was left.

On 2 November 1990, at about 2000 hrs, at the Arboretum, one of the night-watchmen rushed in to inform me that some unusual shrill sounds were coming from a *Parkinsonia aculeata* bush. I rushed to the spot and examined the area by torch light. A grey musk shrew *Suncus*

murinus was repeatedly attacking a big *Rana tigerina*. The unfortunate frog was making the shrill cries. I watched this tussle for three minutes, and the cries were so loud that many people gathered around the bush. The talking and shouting of men and their flashing torches disturbed the shrew and leaving the frog it entered its hole near the roots of the *Parkinsonia* bush.

The frog was quite disabled and unable to move from the many wounds made by the shrew on both its hind legs. However, it was rescued and transferred to a safer place.

Both the events described here suggest that the insect-eating longeared hedgehog and its kin the grey musk shrew may predate on frogs and toads also.

January 7, 1991

SATISH KUMAR SHARMA

7. GREAT CRESTED GREBE *PODICEPS CRISTATUS* IN SAURASHTRA

On 2 January 1989 I went to Amarsar lake which is about 6 km from Wankaner city in Rajkot district, Gujarat. Amongst the usual quota of duck and coots that are found on the lake in winter, I saw a pair of great crested grebes *Podiceps cristatus* with 3 young ones, light coloured, smaller and with prominent dark striations on the neck. The 3 youngsters were keeping close together while the mother fed usually in their proximity. The male bird was normally swimming a little distance away from the group, though the largest of the 3 youngsters frequently went up to the male bird. It was evident that the great crested grebes had bred this monsoon on the lake. This is the first time I have seen youngsters of this grebe in Saurashtra. Though there are occasional records of this bird breeding in Gujarat, I am personally not aware of any published report of its breeding on the Saurashtra peninsula. The occurrence of the bird itself is very rare in Saurashtra.

The next day I observed a very interesting occurrence at the lake. The male great crested grebe caught a frog which had inflated itself to its maximum proportions and had stretched out its limbs fully, probably to prevent

itself from being swallowed. Frogs are known to do this when they are caught by snakes. The male grebe was about 30 m away from the mother and the young and had started swimming towards its family. The largest of the 3 young ones swam towards the oncoming male. For a while it swam side by side with the male, stretching out its beak and demanding the frog from the male. After a minute or so the male allowed the young one to take the frog from him. The youngster swam away for a little distance with the male following it, shifted its grip, raised its beak and neck and swallowed the frog. I was able to take a number of photographs of this occurrence and though the birds were quite a distance away the sequence can be seen. When I tried to row myself in a small boat close to the 3 youngsters who were segregated from the parents, the female, instead of swimming away, crossed in front of my boat and went and joined her brood and then together the group swam away to the further end of the lake.

April 4, 1989

M.K. RANJITSINH

8. SIGHTING OF LEAST FRIGATE BIRD *FREGATA ARIEL* IN BOMBAY

In mid July 1988 a frigate bird *Fregata ariel* was seen at 1730 hrs soaring very low in company with pariah *Milvus migrans govinda* and brahminy *Haliastur indus*

kites above the United Services Club promenade adjacent to the sea at the southern-most tip of Bombay. Its features were clearly visible and it was easily identified as an adult

male of the least frigate bird by the white patches under the wings and other characteristics as described by Ali and Ripley (1978) and Tuck and Heinzel (1980). Abdulali (1960) has discounted Ferguson's (1904) record as uncertain, though Ali (1970) and Faizi (1985) have included it as a record. To put the records straight, there are three previous records from India: an adult male (Abdulali 1960), a juvenile (Ali 1970, Faizi 1985). The present is the fourth

for India. These records made in June and early July coincide with the south-west monsoon, indicating that the high speed monsoon winds probably sweep these vagrants to our western coast.

Prof. R.M. Naik and Taej Mundkur commented on an earlier draft.

March 5, 1989

RISHAD NAOROJI

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9. GLOSSY IBIS *PLEGADIS FALCINELLUS* (LINN.) AND PAINTED STORK *MYCTERIA LEUCOCEPHALA* (PENNANT): TWO MORE ADDITIONS TO THE BIRD LIST OF KERALA

On 8 November 1987, we were observing a group of about 60 cattle egrets *Bubulcus ibis* feeding in an uncultivated paddy field at Kattampally, a wetland near Cannanore. A dark coloured curlew-like bird among the egrets attracted our attention. Its upperparts were chestnut in colour and the tail black. The long, down-curved bill and legs were also dark. From the feathered head and the absence of white colour on the body, we identified the bird as a glossy ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*. After some time, a marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus* glided overhead and the whole group took off. The cattle egrets settled near us while the glossy ibis circled overhead for several minutes. Its rounded wings and chestnut underparts could be observed clearly. On 28 October 1987, one of us (C. S.) had observed seven birds of this species in flight near the same place, which could not be identified at that time. This species has never been reported from Kerala before.

The Parassinikadavu Snake Park about 13 km from

Cannanore has, apart from snakes, a collection of several wild animals and birds, most of them donated by people all over Cannanore and Kasaragod districts of north Kerala. On hearing of the arrival of a rare bird at the Park, we visited it on 26 January 1988. The bird turned out to be a painted stork *Mycteria leucocephala*. It had been found in a paddy field in Eramam village, about 30 km north of Cannanore, in the first week of January 1988. The bird being uncommon, the villagers caught and handed it over to the Snake Park. Though very weak and probably injured when it was brought to the Park, the bird seemed to be recuperating on a diet of fish, frogs etc. This species also is being reported from Kerala for the first time.

C. SASHI KUMAR

C. JAYAKUMAR

MUHAMMED JAFFER

April 4, 1989

10. A STRANGE PREDATORY HABIT OF THE PARIAH KITE *MILVUS MIGRANS*

We were watching birds along the banks of the Kudamuruti, a branch of the Uyyakondon Canal of the Cauvery river, in the early morning on 29 April 1989. More than ten male baya weaver birds *Ploceus philippinus* were making nests in a male palmyra tree. The nests were in different stages of construction. A pariah kite *Milvus*

migrans glided to the vicinity of the nest tree and all the bayas, alarmed, flew to nearby plantain and other trees. The predator seemed unconcerned with the adult nest builders. Thrice it circled the tree, turned each time upside down and clung on with its talons to a partially built nest with wings spread. It selected only those nests whose egg